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ABSTRACT

Educational accountability is a serious concern of legislative bodies representing the people paying the costs involved in community college education. Most cost evaluations have, up to now, revolved about operational costs such as those associated with instruction and plant operation. However, newer evaluations are centering on program quality and effectiveness. In this sense community college self-scrutiny moves from evaluation to accountability. This involves a complex, time-consuming, on-going, and multi-faceted process. Studies based on this process are needed to reaffirm legislator faith in higher education. Carnegie Commission guidelines can be the evaluation criteria by which a legislature assesses its state's post-secondary educational system. Restrictive measures imposed by state government can possibly infringe upon the autonomy of the college. Not all accountability methodologies are suitable for every community college, but when possible they should be used in conjunction with long range planning. The public, throught its legislators, demands evidence of community college effectiveness and efficiency. The careful matching of appropriate goals and objectives for individual community colleges and their different programs along with relevant evaluation and accountability methods can meet that demand. (AL)

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ACCOUNTABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BODIES

by

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The fact that this whole meeting is dedicated to accountability indicates the serious concern that all of us as Community College educators feel for the subject. We have already listened to the subject being discussed as it relates to vocational-technical education, the administration, and to accreditation, and now as it relates to legislative bodies. Or more specifically as it relates to those elected representatives of the people who pay for much of the cost of a community college education.

Those who support community colleges have always wanted to know just what they were supporting. Many writers are now saying that the time has arrived for all higher education to take a close, critical look at itself. Hasn't it always been this? However, the self-scrutiny now seems to be taking a different form as it needs to if we are to keep abreast of all the changes in community colleges.

Inasmuch as all the community colleges enjoy some kind of state support, we have been reporting to legislatures for years in our annual or biennial requests for state funds. Some kind of account-ability has been necessary in making these requests. The chief method has been reporting the number of students both in terms of headcount and full-time equated student through different methods at different colleges and states and usually getting an appropriation

based on these figures. We have prepared in varying degrees elaborate statistics on the costs of different elements in the college programs -- instructional costs, frequently divided into liberal arts costs and vocational-technical costs, library costs, operation and maintenance of physical plant costs, administration and general expenses costs, student personnel costs, etc. We also have accounted for faculty salaries, fees to be collected from students, enrollments predicted, building costs, and many other external, quantified figures. But only rarely have we discussed the quality or effectiveness of our programs.

This is not to say that we have not evaluated our program for we have done a great deal of evaluation particularly in regard to accreditation. All of us have gone through elaborate self-studies in preparation for accrediting team visits and have indicated to ourselves and the accrediting agencies our strengths and weaknesses. We have analyzed our programs principally in terms of our institutional objectives and how well we have succeeded in meeting these stated objectives. We find how effective we really are. But now our self-scrutiny must take a different form and move from evaluation to accountability.

Not only must we still be concerned with all the old things that we were doing in evaluating ourselves but we must now be concerned with evaluating our programs in terms of the resources available to us. Evaluation has been essentially an internal process; accountability must be more external; it must also involve finances. The tendency then is to think only in negative terms so we must make this accountability a positive effort and force. How can we best do

the job? How can we best report to legislatures in order to gain their continued support?

First, it is imperative that we convince legislators that educational accountability in higher education is not a simple process; it is highly complex and not one that can be directly related to the accountability process of industry where products that can easily be measured are being dealt with. Education indeed is dealing with a product but that product happens to be a complex human being. A completed product in industry generally is very measurable in terms of rigid specifications. A completed product in education may be measurable but not in terms of preconceived rigid specifications. There are all kinds of levels of secretaries or nurses or auto mechanics or citizens. But despite the difficulties, we must try for the best possible accounting we can find.

Second, accountability is a time consuming process and not one that can be arrived at over night. If we are to make any judgments at all on our graduates, we must give them a chance to demonstrate their competence. From the time a student begins a program, it will be at least four years before any accountability figures can be meaningful; for it takes the average community college graduate three years to complete his course of study and one has to allow for at least one year on the job before evaluation means anything.

Third, accountability is an on-going process, never completed. Our figures that we prepare in one year may be changed before the next year. We must convince legislators that the process continues even while we are talking and reporting to them.

Fourth, accountability may take many forms but one it should not take for community colleges is some standardized testing or performance contracting. If a community college is to educate students to be technicians and semi-professionals, a standardized test cannot give us a complete answer as to the capabilities of those students. Neither can performance contracting which is currently being tried in some areas. A greater and wider variety of criteria is necessary for us, especially when one considers the open door policy under which we all operate and admit students of varying backgrounds, skills and interests.

In reporting to legislative bodies I believe it well to bear in mind the important role that state legislators play in higher education and that they are as the Carnegie Commission Study by Enlan and Quisley shows "strategic decision makers in politics affecting higher education. The resources mobilized for colleges and universities, the goals to which such resources are allocated, and how they are distributed depend to a great extent on the views and decisions of the nation's legislative bodies." Legislators have, according to this study, and I wholeheartedly agree, a great faith in higher education as evidenced by their tripling appropriations for it over the past decade. They are aware that parent-constituents want educational opportunities for their children. They strongly support public service activities of colleges designed to solve problems that affect the welfare of the state and its people. They view with favor long-range planning of higher education and centralized coordination as a means of making good use of resources and of expressing the will of the state government. They strongly support community

colleges but they feel remote from the complex operations, including finances, of the college or university. All of these points must be kept in mind as we account to legislative bodies for our programs.

In another study the Carnegie Commission has enumerated appropriate criteria by which a state government can evaluate its progress in meeting the goal of a strong and effective system of post-secondary education for all its citizens.

1. The system offers universal access to post-secondary education related to the needs and qualifications of each student.
2. It assumes economic equality of educational opportunity.
3. It assures that instruction will be high quality at all levels and for all academic or vocational fields.
4. It encourages diversity, avoids moving toward homogenity and fosters a broad range of academic, technical, professional, and vocational options.
5. It preserves fundamental institutional autonomy and integrity while recognizing the need for appropriate kinds of public accountability.
6. It continues, to the extent possible, the present pattern of diversification of funding in order to enhance both the diversity of the system and the autonomy of the individual institutions.
7. It responds effectively to manpower needs.
8. It provides incentive for desirable innovation.
9. It supplies adequate state assistance to meet these needs.

These nine statements might be the criteria by which a legislature is held accountable to its constituents. Legislators must not only be held accountable by the people for the consequences of their actions in these matters but also the positive aspects of profiting from the consequences of their actions in these matters. If we accept these criteria or any others like them, and I assume we do, then our accountability to the legislature should follow these lines.

The fifth criteria mentioned above provides the crux of the matter. It preserves fundamental institutional autonomy and integrity while recognizing the need for appropriate kinds of public accountability. Institutional autonomy must of course always be protected but we must not fall into the trap as many have of thinking that any institution has absolute autonomy or independence. All community colleges have a responsibility to their own constituents to operate the colleges in an orderly fashion and also have a responsibility to students to provide the type of education for which the students contracted. The broad types of public accountability, however, involve general fiscal contracts, responsibility for manpower development, and responsibility for meeting general societal education demands.

Let us examine these in terms of our accountability to legislative bodies.

The general level of institutional budgets, both operation and capital outlay, general level of salaries, accounting practices, effective use of resources and effective operation are all matters of concern by legislative bodies. We should and must account to

legislatures in these terms. However, we must as always resist attempts by legislators to approve line-items in the budget or to allocate resources specifically within a college. I am convinced that the best method to prevent this is to present as much information as possible to legislators concerning the operation of the college.

If inadequate information is presented in accounting to the legislature, a community college runs the risk of the legislature establishing several factors inhibiting the growth and development of the college and eroding the autonomy and independence of the institution. Witness the restrictive measures of a state with one of the largest enrollments in community colleges of any state in the nation.

"It is a condition of this appropriation that each community college submit the reports required under this act at such time as required by the legislature."

"A community college shall not establish special programs or expend existing programs which are beyond the scope of the programs of the college already established and recognized by the legislature."

"The governing bodies of community colleges shall charge the following minimum tuition rates per semester credit hour."

"Each community college shall certify to the legislature the schedule of tuition and student fees."

"A community college receiving an appropriation under this act and not collecting or allocating . . . . shall forfeit state funds."

"It is a condition of this appropriation that community colleges henceforth shall pay . . . ."

"All community colleges shall furnish an annual accounting of all income and expenditures to the legislature."

It is a condition of this appropriation that each full-time faculty member who is paid wholly from the category instruction will teach a minimum of not less than an average of 15 credit hours."

"Annually on April 15 every community college shall report to the legislature the percentage of gross budget allocated for scholarships."

Not all of these statements are necessarily bad for the operation of a college but many of them do infringe upon the autonomy of the college. I am not naive enough to suggest any one method of accountability that should be used as a model for all community colleges. There probably should be as many methods as there are differences among community colleges. Nor do I suggest that all restrictive measures by legislatures, or erosions into institutional autonomy, can be stopped by perfect accountability. But I am suggesting that better and more complete accountability can help.

Therefore, I would like to discuss briefly the broad types of public accountability, which as I mentioned earlier involve general fiscal controls, responsibility for manpower development and responsibility for meeting the demands of society. Any one of the numerous systems may be the best for an individual college, whether it be MIS, RRPM-1, PPB, or an input-output type initiated by the University of Florida Study. Whatever it is -- two questions seem to be essential. Are we getting our money's worth in our

community college program? Are our students capable of doing anything better after they have completed their course of study? We must, of course, continue our present methods of accountability but we must go further.

All of us have established institutional goals and objectives but now we must be sure that we have involved our total staff in developing program objectives that can be evaluated. Once these are completed, priorities must be established so that we can move to the cost and general fiscal control. This is where it all comes together -- tieing in the costs of meeting manpower needs and society's demands with the resources available. And judgments have to be made with definite priorities established but with accurate figures it's easier than working in a vacuum. We can in this process then show legislators how very expensive a nursing program is but that if the college is to fulfill its objectives and the legislature its goal of offering universal access to post-secondary education relative to needs, nursing education must have a high priority rank. It is also here that long range planning enters in for it's of little value to only consider the immediate program objectives.

In this process data should be compiled so that adequate answers can be given to the questions that Rouecle, Baker and Brownell among others have suggested. Has the college fulfilled the needs of the community? How well are industrial and business needs being met? Could new industry move into the community if adequate industrial skills were available? Are the basic education needs of adults in the community being met? All of these answers

can be found with the cooperation of the community that the college serves.

Before these can be adequately accomplished, most community colleges would need more staff. But if we are to be held accountable to legislatures, then we should be given the resources to do so. Every community college should have some kind of efficiency expert or quality control expert who does nothing but the above. It would be well worth the money spent for legislatures to meet their goal.

Community colleges must continue the follow-up studies of their students, both occupational and transfer. Of special importance is what do the transfer students do after graduation from a four-year college. We do a good job of following them to the university but forget about them in our studies after they graduate. We must also do follow-up studies on those adults who are part-time students seeking to upgrade themselves. In accounting to legislators, we must resist any temptations to use the system to make exact comparisons between colleges, for each college varies with its programs.

One criteria by which a state government can evaluate its progress in meeting its goals that has not been discussed in these general statements is the one that assures that instruction will be high quality at all levels and for all academic or vocational fields. The hiring, firing, and assignment of faculty and staff should remain with the community college. However, we must be prepared in our accountability to legislative bodies to show that we have a high quality of instruction that comes from adequate salaries, adequate minimum qualifications, an atmosphere conducive to academic freedom,

adequate evaluation procedures, and above all a strong inservice training program. An inservice program must be geared to the performance of students. All must be convinced that resources should be made available to increase accountability in the use of inservice training programs.

M. M. Chambers has stated that "In a very real sense, the efficiency of a college or university today cannot be measured until half a century hence, when today's students will have played their role in life. But the public cannot wait fifty years for a report on which to base this year's decisions." The public, through its legislators, demands some evidence of our effectiveness and efficiency today. Because of this and the demands on the tax dollar I believe all of us are agreed that we must find ways to be more effective and efficient in operating our community college programs.

I would like to mention one study just recently published on input-output models which try to do this, as an example of what we might do in our accountability reporting to legislators. Seven input variables were used in the study: funds for instructional personnel, student personnel services expenditures, library services expenditures, funds to employ a president, size of institution, tuition and fees, and social-economic characteristics of the community. The output variables were related to three of the basic purposes of community colleges -- college-parallel student success, occupational student success, and continuing education student success. Fifteen comprehensive community colleges participated in the study.

Information such as garnered in this study should be useful to us in the management of our own resources but equally important is that it can be useful in accounting to legislatures. For example, one conclusion demonstrated clearly that more successful occupational programs, in terms of completion rates, are found in junior colleges that minimize student tuition and fees as a source of income. Another conclusion was that junior colleges that devote a larger share of their resources to student personnel services enroll a larger portion of their students in occupational courses. At the same time, college-parallel students enrolled in those colleges with a relatively high expenditure in student personnel services are more successful in terms of completion rates.

In the opposite vein the junior colleges that had the highest expenditures on library services had the lowest completion rates. How such information is to be used should be left to each college but the study shows conclusively that the concept of accountability is not uniformly and universally accepted. I believe we must accept it and report as best we can to our legislative bodies if we and they are to achieve our mutual goals of providing equality of educational opportunity for each individual and meeting the needs of all the people instead of providing for the needs of an elite few.

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